CHAPTER – III

HUMAN RIGHTS SITUATION OF DALITS IN BIHAR
Caste identities are deeply embedded and influence much of Bihar's social economic and political life. Bihar tends to be the most unfortunate repository of the brutalities of the caste system. The modifications and differentiations triggered in the wake of interaction between capitalism and semi-feudalism has failed to alter the basic contours of its oppressive social structure. In Bihar caste seems to maintain its presence as "a dead weight holding back not merely the economic and political but also the cultural and moral development of society and even putting its imprint on the new emerging classes."¹

Dalits have been the worst sufferers in the exploitative social order. No sphere of life is such where equality is accorded to them in interaction with superiors in caste hierarchy. They work on land but can not claim it, perform services essential to the maintenance of society but are ranked lowest in the social hierarchy, produce consumption material but are rendered untouchables. Segregation and exploitation have been their fate. They have been denied elementary facilities available to clean castes and are condemned to live in insularity. They are born in servitude and die in penury. They continue to be peripheral and marginal incapable to claim equality with the privileged. Society remains expansive, unfair and criminally unjusst to them. In rural Bihar, the life of a Dalit is

reduced to total dependency on the landlord, since in most places semi-bonded agricultural labour is the only source of livelihood, so also their political life is often reduced to the status of being vote-banks for those who control their lives."2 The most deprived and down-trodden among the Dalits of Bihar are the Musahars who are placed at the margin of subsistence surviving on rats, snails, snakes or anything else they can find and live in a kind of social thraldom sometimes selling themselves and their wives and children to life long servitude for paltry sums. Dalits are placed unfavourably in the ownership of productive assets as well as the distribution of income. Inequalities tend to be cumulative in their case.

Caste as a system of hierarchical submission operates as a mechanism of extra-economic coercion of Dalits. It contains prescriptions to ensure unrestrained acquiescence of Dalits to caste Hindus by incultating in them the dominant traits of humbleness. The traditional etiquette has definite political consciousness as it helps in nurturing instincts of submission among the exploited. In the prevalent social arrangement Dalits have been subjected to various kinds of status disabilities. The values internalised entailed upon Dalits the solemn duty

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to serve the superior in caste hierarchy. Such prescription could not be challenged.

The 'dola' system was an institutionalised system of sexual exploitation of Dalit women. Such was the stranglehold of the feudal order in the village that upper caste landlords were supposed to have an undisputed right over Dalits and backward caste women. As such every newly married Dalit women had to pass her first night after marriage with the village landlord. Thus those who escaped being raped by the landlords had to undergo the trauma after getting married. These were extra-economic methods devised by the landlords to continuously remind this lower in the caste hierarchy of their 'aukat'.

Dalits not only lack the means to celebrate, but they are also entitled to observe various Hindu festivals lest they antagonise the dignity of upper castes. Festival have always meant humiliation to them and their female members. Thus in the celebration of Hindu festival Holi, famous for its vulgarity, it is the Dalit women who always have to bear the brunt of the upper caste people. In the manner it used to be observed in Bihar, Holi represents very directly the subjugation of the lower caste women in particular. Sexually explicit songs, molestation and even rape

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of the Dalit women have been a common feature. On refusal to satisfy the sexual lust of the upper castes, the Dalit bastis have been burned to ashes in many cases. Thus refusal to comply with the established tradition invites severest of the punishment to Dalits in various parts of Bihar.

The 1985 report of the L.N. Mishra Institute of Economic and Growth regarding the work of the Bihar Corporation for the Development of the Scheduled Castes observed that more than 95% of Dalits in Bihar live below poverty line. The majority of them remain untouchable as before and suffer from traditional restrictions- they have no access to common drinking water sources, tea-shops and eating houses, cannot walk on the main village streets and so on. In the districts which are surveyed Dalits had no knowledge of the existence of the Protection of Civil Rights Act (1955) and in all the villages of these districts Dalits live in segregated areas beyond the village bounds.  

In a similar survey regarding social disabilities of Dalits conducted in the districts of Nawada, Rohtas and Madhubani, it was found that different areas recorded different forms of social disability of Dalits depending on attitude and behaviour of caste Hindus towards Dalits and dominance of upper caste people. In the Nawada district the social

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4 Cited in E.S. Yurlova's, Scheduled Castes in India, p. 126, Patriot Publishers, New Delhi, 1990.
disabilities faced by the Dalits were found to be of limited nature in public places but at the same time caste Hindus of the area particularly Rajputs and Bhumihars still maintained their casteist attitude towards Dalits. In the Rohtas district social disability and untouchability existed to a much greater extent. Dalit children were not allowed to join the schools, and if admitted were not allowed to sit together with the children of caste Hindus. In Madhubani Dalits were not allowed to utilise the bathing ghats, tea stalls, public temples used by the caste Hindus. The social disabilities faced by Dalits was regarded customary by caste Hindus particularly Brahmins and Dalits were forced to lead a sub-human life. In a nut shell social disability and untouchability by and large existed both in over and covert forms in various parts of Bihar. 5

The idioms in which the landlords addressed the untouchable have been one of ridicule, abuse and contempt. Upper Castes as well as Yadav and Kurmi land-lords persisted in treating Dalits as inferiors, abusing them in terms such as ‘rape mother’ and ‘rape sister’ and sexually assaulting Dalit women. They also generally refused demands for wages in accordance with government rates and stopped some of the traditional side payments, even evicted some of Dalits from homestead lands. 6

6 Francine R. Frankel; “Caste, Land and Dominance in Bihar” p.p.121-122 in Francine R. Frankel and M.S.A Rao (eds), Dominance and State Power in Modern India, Oxford (India), New Delhi, 1993.
Education is an important means of reducing ignorance and inequality in society. It helps the individual to raise his social status in various ways. Knowledge, skills, values and attitudes acquired through education helps one to lead a desired quality of life.

In census enumeration a person is counted as literate if he or she can read and write in any language with understanding. In earlier censuses the whole population was classified as literates and illiterates. Whereas from 1951 the questions on literacy have been categorised among those aged 5 and above. However, in the 1991 census this classification was confined to the age group of 7 years and above. The literacy rate of social groups in Bihar is presented in Table 3.1. This table presents the literacy rate of Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and all groups for 1961, 1971, 1981, and 1991.
### Table - 3.1. Literacy Rate of Social Groups in Bihar

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Literacy Rate</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SC</td>
<td>6.0</td>
<td>6.5</td>
<td>10.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ST</td>
<td>9.2</td>
<td>11.6</td>
<td>17.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All</td>
<td>18.4</td>
<td>9.9</td>
<td>26.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rural</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SC</td>
<td>5.4</td>
<td>5.8</td>
<td>9.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ST</td>
<td>8.6</td>
<td>10.7</td>
<td>15.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All</td>
<td>15.3</td>
<td>17.2</td>
<td>22.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urban</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SC</td>
<td>15.1</td>
<td>16.6</td>
<td>24.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ST</td>
<td>28.8</td>
<td>32.3</td>
<td>38.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All</td>
<td>40.1</td>
<td>44.9</td>
<td>52.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Census of India, Series - 1, Final population totals: Brief analysis of Primary Census Abstract 1961-1991. Primary Census

The general condition of education among Scheduled castes is pitiable. It is a matter of common knowledge that the Scheduled Castes have lagged behind in the field of education not only in Bihar but all over the country. In 1961 the literacy rate among Scheduled Castes in Bihar was only 6%. It increased to 6.5% in 1971 and 10.40% in 1981. Whereas in 1991 the literacy rate among Scheduled castes in Bihar was only 15% which happens to be the lowest in India. The rural and urban areas level of literacy rate among Scheduled Castes have been very low as compared to other social grouts. The female literacy rate among Scheduled Castes have been pathetically low in Bihar.

One of the institutions for economic exploitation of Dalits has been the 'Kamia System' reported to be operative in a number of districts in Bihar. The system seems to have been based on the mechanism of credit and indebtedness. In order to ensure control over labour in time of distress in the post harvest period in the exceptional times, the rich peasantry would advance small loans to the poor cultivators whereby they secure control over cultivators labour till repayment of debt was complete. In the absence of possession of land, animals and the elementary agricultural inputs, such hapless peasantry could be the most convenient target of the landed castes. Once in debt the poor could
not escape from being fleeced by the landlord under the system of bondage. The conditions of debt-repayment were so fixed that even the best efforts by the debtor could not ensure his release from the clutches of the landlord. Thus to prevent repayment of debt given to the Kamia, the landowner had a condition that unless it was repaid on a certain day usually sometime in the ‘Jyeth’ when the funds are low, it was optional for the master to refuse acceptance.7

In some of the areas, in addition to debt slavery a system of bondage nurtured by the caste system the landowning upper castes and the labours belonging to the scheduled castes bind themselves in a life long stable alliance. The bondage is hereditary as it relates to relationship between patrilinical descent groups of masters and servants. As an institution of fairly long standing it is a channel to transmit rights and obligations from one generation to another. Under the system the landless labourer turns out to be a transferable commodity sold and mortgaged to settle problem situations.8

The inter-decennial trends in occupational categories among the working population of scheduled castes are brought out in the Table.3.2. The data for this is taken from the decennial censuses of 1981 and 1991. Data regarding the scheduled castes has been presented in a primary

8 Ibid p. 20.
census abstract released in 1993. It gives distribution of SC, population, as well as of main workers by nine industrial categories. Adoption of almost the same definitions and concepts of work and workers in the two censuses permit us to compare participation rates as well as distribution by sex and residence for 1981 and 1991. For the comparative analysis, 1981 and 1991 workforce in clubbed into four categories i.e., cultivators, agricultural labourers, household industry and other workers. The basic aims of analysis are whether the socially disadvantaged groups having any impact of the developmental programme. Are they concentrated in agricultural sector or the structural shifts in their case are forwards the more productive sector of the economy as compared to general category? Are the shifts in their case less than the other groups i.e., whether they are equal partners in the process of economic development or not. We also analyse the workforce among the various segment of scheduled castes and try to locate whether they are equal partners in the process of economic development or not.

Here our analyses are limited to 1981-91 census data by main activity for rural main workers by social groups. It may be pointed out that general category i.e., non-SC/ST has been derived by substracting scheduled caste and scheduled tribe figures from the ‘total’ figures.
Table 3.2.
RURAL WORKFORCE DISTRIBUTION IN BIHAR (in percentage)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cultivators</td>
<td>54.02</td>
<td>14.40</td>
<td>65.71</td>
<td>53.00</td>
<td>16.48</td>
<td>65.93</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M</td>
<td>56.92</td>
<td>17.42</td>
<td>70.55</td>
<td>55.39</td>
<td>18.96</td>
<td>69.21</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>30.70</td>
<td>6.39</td>
<td>51.97</td>
<td>36.72</td>
<td>9.64</td>
<td>58.08</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agricultural</td>
<td>31.06</td>
<td>76.51</td>
<td>23.86</td>
<td>33.39</td>
<td>75.64</td>
<td>26.19</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Labourers</td>
<td>27.43</td>
<td>72.03</td>
<td>18.35</td>
<td>30.01</td>
<td>71.79</td>
<td>21.90</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M</td>
<td>56.92</td>
<td>17.42</td>
<td>70.55</td>
<td>55.39</td>
<td>18.96</td>
<td>69.21</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>30.70</td>
<td>6.39</td>
<td>51.97</td>
<td>36.72</td>
<td>9.64</td>
<td>58.08</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Household</td>
<td>2.39</td>
<td>2.11</td>
<td>1.84</td>
<td>1.50</td>
<td>1.56</td>
<td>1.32</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Industries</td>
<td>2.29</td>
<td>2.10</td>
<td>1.76</td>
<td>2.12</td>
<td>1.74</td>
<td>1.49</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M</td>
<td>12.52</td>
<td>6.98</td>
<td>8.59</td>
<td>12.04</td>
<td>6.27</td>
<td>6.51</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>5.78</td>
<td>3.08</td>
<td>6.49</td>
<td>4.76</td>
<td>2.35</td>
<td>3.98</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Rural workforce distribution in Bihar for general as well as scheduled castes and scheduled tribe for 1981 and 1991 census are presented in table 3.2 for persons, male/females in rural areas. It shows very clearly that major share of the rural workforce is dependent on agricultural sector (cultivators and agricultural labourers). By this table we attempt to study the changes over the period 1981-91 in the distribution of scheduled castes and general category workers across various sectors or industrial categories. That is to say, we will analyse the comparative structural shift for the different social groups. Workers
data in 1981 for the scheduled caste in the Primary Census Abstract is presented by only four categories rather than nine industrial categories. Thus concealing very important information like changes in participation of scheduled caste in non-household industry and the modern services sectors. Due to this data limitation, we can answer this question only partially. As already mentioned to make the 1981 and 1991 data comparable, nine industrial category data has been clubbed into four categories, namely cultivators, Agricultural labours, Household industry and others which include the remaining primary, secondary and tertiary sector activities.

While comparing 1981 and 1991 proportion of cultivators to rural workforce we find (Table.3.2) that there is a marginal decline in case of general category cultivators from 54.02 to 53.00 i.e., 1.02 percent were dispossessed of land. On the contrary there is increase of 2.08 per cent in case of scheduled caste cultivators. This marginal increase might have been because of some governmental programmes where in scheduled castes have been provided with some land through distribution of surplus land.

Table.3.2 describes the share of workforce employed as agricultural labourers for the general and scheduled caste workers. Incidence of agricultural labour is the highest for the scheduled castes in 1981 as well as in 1991. Infact during the decade it has marginally
decreased from 76.51 in 1981 to 75.64 in the year 1991. It shows that
majority of the scheduled castes who have been dispossessed of their
lands have joined the ranks of agricultural labourers rather than getting
absorbed in the high productive sectors. Male/ female patterns suggest
that only 27.43 percents of the males in general category has been listed
as agricultural labourers as compared to 72.03 for the scheduled castes
are working as agricultural labour in 1981. We find a marginal decline in
the decade of 1981-91. Some of them might have become cultivators as
is evident from their marginally increasing share as cultivators may be
due to government policies. Therefore, the analysis clearly shows that
majority of the workforce in the rural areas continue to be employed as
agricultural labourer and the share of scheduled castes are higher than
general category.

In case of general category of household industries it has declined
from 2.39 percent in 1981 to 1.58 percent in 1991 i.e., a shift of little
less than one percent. The share for the scheduled caste has also
deprecated from 2.11 percent to 1.61 percent. The decline is more
perceptible in case of males where the shares were lower than females for
both the social groups.

The shift away from the agricultural sector i.e., cultivators, and
agricultural labour and household industry in negative 0.48 percent in
case of general category followed by negative 0.71 percents in case of
scheduled castes. It is clearly showing that as compared to 1991 more both social groups are dependent on low productive agriculture in 1991. The analysis clearly show that scheduled castes are not getting employment in the modern sectors of the economy to the same magnitude as the general category. The situation in regards to women is certainly bad for the scheduled castes.

Another source to know that occupational pattern is Rural labour Enquiry. The Table 3.3 presents the percentage of rural labour households for the scheduled castes and others (Non SC/ST) for 1974-75, 1983, 1987-88; and 1993-94. Its main purpose is to know the disparities in the magnitude of rural labour among scheduled caste and other and also study the changes in the level of rural labour between 1974-75 and 1993-94. In addition we also know the incidence of rural labour among the households with the land and those without land.

In 1993-94 rural labour households constitute 30.23 per cent of the total rural households among the others and among the scheduled castes io 77.63 per cents. Thus the incidence of wage labor among the schedule castes was the highest as compared to others. In fact the proportion of labour households among the scheduled castes was more than twice the level of others.

Coming to changes, between 1974-75 and 1993-94 the percentage of rural labour households has increased among the others Among the
scheduled castes it is marginally decreased. The share of scheduled caste in total rural household was less than their share in total rural households in 1998-94 (43.33% forces and 48.00 for other). In Bihar

The Rural Labour Rnquiry Reports not only provide the data on the proportion of Rural labour Households, it also gives their break up into rural labour households with land and those without land. Further it also gives the distribution of rural labour households with land by the size of land possessed. Therefore, here are analyse land ownership status of rural labour households among the scheduled castes and other (Non SC/ST) this will help us to know the incidence of labour household by the size of land cultivated particularly among marginal and small farmers.
Table 3.3
Table: Some features of Rural Labour Household in Bihar.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Category and years</th>
<th>Percentage of Rural Labour Households</th>
<th>Percentage of Rural Labour Household with land</th>
<th>Percentage of Rural Labour Household without land</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Scheduled Caste</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1974-75</td>
<td>77.97</td>
<td>51.4</td>
<td>48.6</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1977-78</td>
<td>76.31</td>
<td>55.46</td>
<td>44.56</td>
<td>100</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1983</td>
<td>75.6</td>
<td>36.26</td>
<td>63.74</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1987-88</td>
<td>77.34</td>
<td>74.47</td>
<td>25.53</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1993-94</td>
<td>77.63</td>
<td>23.90</td>
<td>76.10</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Scheduled Tribe</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1974-75</td>
<td>22.39</td>
<td>82.7</td>
<td>17.3</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1977-78</td>
<td>35.96</td>
<td>81.58</td>
<td>18.42</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1983</td>
<td>43.31</td>
<td>77.78</td>
<td>22.22</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1987-88</td>
<td>47.15</td>
<td>92.31</td>
<td>7.69</td>
<td>100</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1993-94</td>
<td>43.18</td>
<td>68.90</td>
<td>31.10</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Non SC/ST</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1974-75</td>
<td>27.0</td>
<td>62.07</td>
<td>37.93</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1977-78</td>
<td>32.78</td>
<td>44.79</td>
<td>55.21</td>
<td>100</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1983</td>
<td>29.89</td>
<td>49.51</td>
<td>50.49</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1987-88</td>
<td>32.60</td>
<td>82.41</td>
<td>17.59</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1992-94</td>
<td>30.23</td>
<td>45.94</td>
<td>54.06</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3.3 revealed that at Bihar level in 1993-94, 45.94 percent of rural labour households owned some land and 54.06 percent were without land among the other group. The rural labour household with land was low i.e., 23.90 percent and it was much higher rural labour household without land i.e., 76.10% for scheduled castes than the other group. Low proportion of rural labour household among the scheduled castes indicate their weak position with regard to ownership of agricultural land.

Coming to changes between 1974-75 and 1993-94 at Bihar level there has been perceptible decreased in the percentage of rural labour households with land from 62.07% in 1974-75 to 45.94 and percentage of rural labour household without land has increased from 48.6% in 1973.74 and 76.10 % 1993-94.

The distribution of rural labour households by size class of land cultivated enable us to know the size-specific incidence of rural labour households among the scheduled castes and others.

**Table 3.4**

**Percentage distribution of Estimated number labour of households with cultivated land by (hectors): 1993-94, Bihar.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Social groups</th>
<th>(&lt;1 acre) (&lt;0.4)</th>
<th>(1-2.5 acre) (0.4-1)</th>
<th>(&gt;2.5 acre) (&gt;1)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>General</td>
<td>76.40</td>
<td>17.30</td>
<td>6.30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SCs</td>
<td>87.00</td>
<td>9.10</td>
<td>3.90</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Table 3.4 showed that in 1993-94 there was major concentration of rural labour households in the size category of less than 1 acre. In case of
scheduled castes 87 percent of land owning labour households come from less than 1-acre size category. The proportion reduced to 9.10 % for 1-2.5 acre category and 3.90 % for 2.50-acre size category for scheduled caste.

**Table. 3.5**

**Distribution of land in Bihar upto March 1999**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Social group</th>
<th>Area in Acre</th>
<th>% of share</th>
<th>Number of Beneficiaries</th>
<th>% beneficiaries</th>
<th>Average land (per Beneficiary in acre)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Ceiling Land</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a) Scheduled castes</td>
<td>18701</td>
<td>58.95</td>
<td>234334</td>
<td>61.74</td>
<td>0.78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b) Scheduled Tribe</td>
<td>39937</td>
<td>12.95</td>
<td>43004</td>
<td>11.33</td>
<td>0.92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c) Others</td>
<td>84849</td>
<td>27.52</td>
<td>101392</td>
<td>26.71</td>
<td>0.83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d) Net category</td>
<td>1736</td>
<td>0.56</td>
<td>788</td>
<td>0.20</td>
<td>2.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>308223</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>3,79518</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>0.81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Government land</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a) Scheduled castes</td>
<td>547571.82</td>
<td>40.95</td>
<td>609565</td>
<td>47.05</td>
<td>0.89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b) Scheduled Tribe</td>
<td>400523.99</td>
<td>29.95</td>
<td>2,58731</td>
<td>19.97</td>
<td>1.54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c) Ex-Army</td>
<td>7759.57</td>
<td>0.58</td>
<td>9669</td>
<td>0.74</td>
<td>0.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d) Backward castes</td>
<td>2,44266.19</td>
<td>18.26</td>
<td>281746</td>
<td>21.75</td>
<td>0.86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e) Others</td>
<td>50425.70</td>
<td>3.7</td>
<td>49755</td>
<td>3.84</td>
<td>1.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>f) Net categorwise</td>
<td>86583.33</td>
<td>6.47</td>
<td>86002</td>
<td>6.64</td>
<td>3.32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>13,3709040</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>12,95468</td>
<td>100</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


1. Ceiling Land

Land declared surplus – 415447 acre

Total land distributed—308223 acre

Total number of beneficiaries—379518
2. Government land

Total land available – 1597083.80 acre

Total land distributed – 13,37090.40 acre

Total number of beneficiaries – 1295468

Access to Agricultural Land

About 91 percent of the Scheduled castes live in rural area where the main source of income is either cultivation of agricultural land (as self employed farmer), wage labour or some type of non-farm employment thus access to land for cultivation is critical. The surplus land through ceiling and government land are distributed to scheduled castes on priority basis. As on upto March, 1999, the surplus ceiling land 379518 acres were distributed to scheduled castes, 39937 acres to scheduled tribe and 86585 acres to non-SC/ST. A total of 379518 beneficiaries have been so far covered, of which 234334 were scheduled caste, 43004 scheduled tribe and 102180 non SC/ST. (Table 3.5)

The scheduled caste beneficiaries accounted for about 61.74 percent, the share in area was around 58.95 percent. The land distributed to SCs per beneficiaries comes to 0.78 acres, which was nearer to average per distribution (0.81 acre).
Similarly, as on upto March 1999, the surplus government land 13,3709040 acres were distributed at all Bihar level. Of these about 547571.82 acres were distributed to the scheduled castes (Table. 3.5).

The scheduled castes beneficiaries accounted for about 47.05 percent, the share in area was around 40.95 percent. The land distributed to scheduled castes per beneficiaries comes to 0.89 acre.

Table.3.6
Ownership of Agricultural land by size-class of holding.
Scheduled castes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No</th>
<th>Size of Class</th>
<th>% holding</th>
<th>Area</th>
<th>% holding</th>
<th>Area</th>
<th>Average area owned hec./acre</th>
<th>% holding</th>
<th>Area</th>
<th>Average area owned hec./Acre</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Landless</td>
<td>7.92</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>19.73</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>8.58</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Less than 1 hectare</td>
<td>88.77</td>
<td>60.18</td>
<td>77.08</td>
<td>58.37</td>
<td>0.36</td>
<td>71.98</td>
<td>28.58</td>
<td>0.37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(2.49 acre)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(0.89)</td>
<td>(0.91)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>1.01-2.00 hectare</td>
<td>2.03</td>
<td>17.28</td>
<td>1.97</td>
<td>17.80</td>
<td>1.37</td>
<td>11.10</td>
<td>23.84</td>
<td>1.38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(2.50-4.96 acre)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(3.39)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>2.01-4.00 hectare</td>
<td>1.11</td>
<td>17.3</td>
<td>1.05</td>
<td>17.78</td>
<td>2.92</td>
<td>6.00</td>
<td>24.46</td>
<td>2.87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(4.98-9.90 acre)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(7.24)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>4.01-10.00 hectare</td>
<td>0.17</td>
<td>5.24</td>
<td>0.16</td>
<td>6.04</td>
<td>5.39</td>
<td>2.14</td>
<td>18.68</td>
<td>6.19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(9.92-24.76 acre)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(13.35)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>10.01 &amp; above</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.2</td>
<td>4.44</td>
<td>16.34</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(24.78 acre &amp; above)</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>40.44</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Table 3.6 depicts the situation of scheduled castes with respect to ownership of agricultural land in rural area for 1982 and 1992 (land
ownership data is not available for earlier rounds. It is observed that about 19.73 percent of scheduled caste household in Bihar were landless in 1992. Thus ratio was higher as compared to 8.58 percent for all households.

Despite the distribution of land under ceiling and government land the percentage of scheduled castes landless households has increased from 7.92 percent in 1982 to 19.73 percent in 1992, nearly 80.27 percent of scheduled caste household own some land in 1992. However, of these nearly 77.08 percent were holding owing less than 2.49 acres in 1992. The average area owned by this small farmer is 0.89 acre which is near landless household. The landless and near landless but together account nearly 96.8 percent of the total scheduled caste household. It's indicate pitiable condition of scheduled castes in Bihar.

The report of the Commissioner for Scheduled caste and Scheduled Tribe for 1979-81 shows that Bihar was not among the twelve states with the highest number of atrocities against Dalits between 1967 and 1974. Suddenly in that year Bihar made its first appearance as the sixth worst case; in 1974 it was ranked fourth, and then third for the four years from 1976 to 1979. In subsequent years Bihar has remained near the top of the table. As a matter of fact since the middle of the 1970s till the present day sharp clashes have been going on between the landowners and Dalit agricultural labourers. Landlords have set up their own
militant gangs to fight against those who refuse to submit to their domination in the villages. They have let loose a reign of terror in large areas in Bihar. They have carried out especially cruel reprisals against poor and helpless Dalits. From 1977 onwards the incidence of crimes against Dalits have been steadily rising. 681 cases were reported in 1977; 1911 in 1978; 2457 in 1979; 1890 in 1980; and from 1981 to 1986; 10873 cases of crimes against Dalits have been reported from Bihar. Thus from 1977 to 1986 in all 17812 cases of crimes against Dalits were reported. Whereas from 1992 to 1997 prior to Laxmanpur Bathe carnage in which 61 dallies are reported to have been murdered in cold blood, around 8736 cases have been reported.

The state of Emergency was a major factor in the emergence of the violent politics of contemporary Bihar. This period did Operation Thunder, but also a left authoritarianism in the form of efforts to bring about land reform exemplify notable not nearly for right wing authoritarianism? There were other anti-poverty and social reform measurers that were part of the '20 point programme' of the Emergency, including the ending of bonded labour- a matter which mostly affected untouchables and tribals.) Prior to the Emergency in Bihar not a single acre of land had been resumed and redistributed to the landless under

the existing land ceiling legislation. Under strict instructions from New Delhi, some 225,000 acres were redistributed during the Emergency. Of course, this figure was pitiful relative to the overall need for redistribution to the tiller. Even worse, in the ensuing years most of this land was clawed back by the owners through court action. Nonetheless, for the first time land was changing hands at the behest of the state, and it was mainly Untouchables who were the beneficiaries. Such action contributed to a long term heightening of consciousness among untouchables that their lot in life was not merely to accept their own landlessness.\textsuperscript{11}

The period of Karpoori Thakur's Chief Ministership from 1977 to 1980 marked the beginning of a major upsurge in the number of Dalit atrocities reported from Bihar. There remains doubt as to the extent to which Thakur's own actions precipitated the upsurge. This part of the explanation for the increased violence at this time was that the legacy of the Emergency was being contested in relation to land that had been at least notionally reassigned by the state to untouchables and other landless people. Sometimes the land so assigned was 'wasteland' used as

\textsuperscript{11} Oliver Mendelsohn and Marika Vicziany, The Untouchables: Subordination, Poverty and the State in Modern India, p.60, Cambridge University Press, Indira Printers, New Delhi, 1998.
a common grazing resource for the village as a whole. On other occasions the land had been resumed from the individual landlords as being surplus to the enacted ceiling on landownership. In both situations, typically the new assignment of land was bitterly resented and was the direct cause of many violent clashes between dominant landholding communities and untouchables. 12

Thus one of the chief peculiarities of the violent situation in Bihar has been the intensification of the struggle for land, for the right to cultivate the plot received from the government in accordance with the agrarian reforms and to gather harvest from it, and also for raising the wages of agricultural workers, many among whom are Dalits. This struggle is seen most acutely in the clashes between the Dalit agricultural workers and the dominant caste landowners.

The worst of the caste carnage over the past two decades or so has been concentrated in the following ten districts of Bihar: Patna, Nalanda, Jehanabad, Gaya, Nawadah, Aurangabad, Bhojpur, Buxar, Bhabhua and Rohtas. The population of Dalits in these ten districts of Magadh and Patna division is around 20% of the total population of these two divisions. The majority of the Dalits are landless labourers. They not only are socially ostracised, deemed to be the most inferior in matters of social standing. Over the years the conditions of severe economic vulnerability

12 Ibid p. 61
and decreasing legitimacy of domination, the spread of new political values and organisations have finally taken root. The challenges from Dalits have increased and are being met with sharp hostility. The private caste armies are products of that hostility. Challenges from Dalits are seen by the land owning castes as threat to both their economic dominance and social status. There has been a characteristic response from the land owning castes: “How dare they challenge our authority”? Much of the conflict is about teaching the Dalits and their organisers a lesson in subservience, about keeping them in their place.¹³

Nine major caste carnage starting from Belchi in 1977 to Laxmanpur Bathe in 1997 are mentioned here as the examples of junge raj and killing fields prevalent in Bihar which have put a question mark not only on the civil society but also on the governability of the state.

1. Belchi

Belchi is an inaccessible village of Patna district. It has no proper approach road to make the village accessible round the year. With inadequate communication facilities and lack of interest on the part of authorities concerned with the development of the area, the village has remained backward. This otherwise “sleepy” and obscure village attracted the attention of all sections of the country when on May 27, 1977, eight

Dalits and three member of the backward castes were shot down and thrown into a common funeral pyre. The culprits were suspected to belong to a gang under the name of “Banduk dhari party”\textsuperscript{14} of Kurmi landlords who killed those posing a threat to their stranglehold over the power structure of the village.

The Union Home Ministry said in a Press note that gang warfare between two rival groups of criminals was responsible for the May 27 incident in Belchi village near Patna in which 11 persons were killed. Quoting reports received from the State Government, the Home Ministry said that the incident had no caste, communal, agrarian or political orientation and “it had nothing to do with atrocities on weaker sections of society”\textsuperscript{15} This was however disputed by many,

The 9-member Parliamentary committee headed by Mr. Ramdhan which conducted an enquiry came to the conclusion that the Bihar government’s report “that there was a clash between two groups of hardened criminals having long standing rivalry is totally false.” According to the committee, it was instead a case of premeditated, well planned mass murder of landless Scheduled castes by a large gang of Kurmis, the prosperous farmers of the area who had secured firearms through the influence of local political leader. There was no encounter. The

\textsuperscript{14} National Herald, New Delhi, 6 June, 1977.

\textsuperscript{15} Indian Express, New Delhi, 9 June, 1977.
murderers caught hold of their eleven victims, tied them up with ropes, poured kerosene on them and threw them into a mass pyre.\textsuperscript{16}

The commissioner for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes thus observed:

"There are reasons to believe that it was a case of atrocities committed on Scheduled Castes. Though no apparent political motives could be ascribed to this incident, there was definite economic and social motives. Well-to-do sections among the Kurmis wanted to maintain their unchallenged economic and social supremacy and tried to be ruthless in dealing with persons of Scheduled Castes, Community who posed any threat to their over lordship. Killing of 11 persons in broad-day light could be accomplished only by hardened criminals and just because some of them were involved in criminal activities against their own caste men should not be taken as indication that they did not carry out atrocities on Scheduled castes and indulged in criminal warfare only".\textsuperscript{17}

The brutal murder of Singhwa and others left the poor downtroddens of Belchi defence less against the rampaging caste ridden

\textsuperscript{16} Indian Express, New Delhi, 16 July 1977.
\textsuperscript{17} Report, Commissioner for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, P. 111, New Delhi, 1975-76, and 1977-78.
landlords of the area. Singwa was the light, which the gangsters have put out throwing the Belchi into utter darkness at the moment.\textsuperscript{18}

2. Parasbigha

Parasbigha, the village which became the scene of gruesome caste violence early in February 1980 is situated to the right of the Jahanabad-Gaya road, some 5 kms from the district headquarter of Jahanabad. From the road to the village, a distance of 2 kms has to be covered through paddy fields before one is able to reach the village. During rainy season, the undulating foot-paths in between the fields become slippery, extremely narrow and untraversable.

It was this village that was invaded by a pack of upper caste Bhumihars in the night of February 6, 1980. Houses were set on fire and when the inmates tried to escape, they were shot and thrown into the leaping flame. Twelve lives were lost-7 women, 2 children and 3 men. Of them 6 alone belonged to the family of Sukhdeo Bhagat, a sephard by caste. The Bhumihars were avenging the murder of Niranjan Sharma, one of their caste who was assassinated in October 1979 in the village. They suspected that the sephards, and particularly Sukhdeo Bhagat had

\textsuperscript{18} Patriot, New Delhi, 2 July, 1977.
a hand in the murder, who also happened to be the leader of the dissenting lower caste groups in the village.\textsuperscript{19}

3. Pipra

It was ten in the night of February 25, 1980, when the untouchable locality of the Abdalpur-Pipra village was invaded by the neighbouring village Kalyanchak of Patna district. The invaders numbering about 200 were armed to the teeth, mostly with fire-arms. They set on fire the twenty-seven houses of the untouchables made mostly of mud and straw, shot indiscriminately, looted their belongings and burnt alive their cattles.

For full six hours the shooting spree went on with unabated fury. Fourteen untouchables lay dead. Such was the scale of brutality that the marauders caught hold of a two-year-old boy and tossed him into the all devouring leaping flame.

The Kurmis were avenging the murder of one Bhola Singh, a large landowner from Kalyanchak. It was alleged that the Bhola Singh was done to death by the Naxals who were supposed to be organising the untouchables of the area against the tyrannies of the land owners. The

Kurmis suspected that the untouchables of Pipra were in complicity with Naxals.20

4. Arwal.

April 19, 1986 is a black day in the history of post-independence Bihar. The incidents that occurred in Arwal in the district of Jahanabad-are manifestation of sheer barbarism and raw power. These revealed the shocking magnitude to which repressive apparatus of the State may go. On this day 21 people belonging to the Mazdoor Kissan Sangram Samiti (MKSS) were killed in Police firing. The incident arose out of a dispute between nine families (eight scheduled castes and one backward caste) and an Executive Engineer (belonging to one of the Scheduled Castes) over a tiny marshy and uncultivable piece of land. The land was in dispute for over nine years and inspite of the court verdict against the Engineer, he managed to take possession of the land due to his excellent rapport with the Police and the State administration. In the month of January 1986, he demolished the huts of nine families and erected a concrete wall around the plot with the help of police. In protest against this a strong mob of MKSS demolished the wall.

On the fateful day, the hundreds of members of MKSS participated in the operation wall removal. The Police felt humiliated, some members

20 Ibid, P.37.
of the MKSS were also arrested. This, however, did not appear much in the eyes of the Police. The humiliated police officer instead of diffusing the tension made it a matter of prestige. In order to teach these people a lesson and also in order to assure the feudal elements of the area about the unstinted support of the administration- the superintendent of Police called for more assistance. The place where the participants of the protest movement were holding an entirely peaceful meeting was combed by the police in a manner so as to prevent peaceful dispersal of the gathering. And it turned out to be another 'Jallianwala Bagh massacre.\textsuperscript{21}

The claim of the police to have fired in self-defence was dubbed by the people's Tribunal as one unworthy of credence and criticised this act of cruelty in the following words.

The firing in question was highly indiscriminate, unnecessary and unjustified. This firing amounted to brutal murder of 21 citizens of this country.\textsuperscript{22}

A fact finding team of people's Union for Democratic Right (PUDR) observed that massacre at Arwal was a barbarous and unprovoked firing at a peaceful meeting which will rank as one of the worst of police excesses in post-independence India. But the massacre at Arwal was


not the result of land dispute over 1/4 of an acre, neither was it due to Baidyanath Rajak's clout, conspiracies by congress (I) leaders, or C.R Kaswan's described by local people as the General Dyer of Arwal -trigger happy nature or even the corruption and brutalisation which characterises Bihar's administration. All these had a part to play, but were in the final analysis incidental. To understand why Arwal happened we have to understand why people here are organising themselves on questions of economic justice and human dignity and the response to this by the local elites and the state. It is the response of the state to Arwal which marks, in a sense, a turning point. The subdivision of Jehanabad was declared a police district on first of April 1986, shortly after the Chief Minister in Paliganj is reported to have given local land owners a promise that the Naxalites would be dealt with. C.R Kaswan was appointed S.P. on the 16th April 1986 and the massacre at Arwal occurred on the 19th April 1986, only three days later. This conjunction of dates was too close to be a mere coincidence and it lent weight to the suspicion that Arwal was a pre-planned mass murder.23

5. Kansara

On July 8, 1986, about 150 persons of Bhumihar caste armed with

23 Report, Behind The Killings in Bihar, P. 43, People's Union For Democratic Rights (PUDR), New Delhi, July 1986.
rifles, guns and pistols and other lethal weapons attacked the Kahar tola of kansara and in a brutal way killed ten landless labourers. The attack was to avenge the murder of one Vijay Singh, the news of whose death led to this violent attack on the Kahars. Vijay Singh, a Bhumihar by caste was a terror in its area who not only gave shelters to known criminals but also use to harass Dalits in many ways and was also alleged to have raped Dalit women. It is said that latest tension was sparked off by a dispute over possession of fishes in a pond. The labourers are said to have foiled the attempts of the Bhumihar landlords to keep them away in state of perpetual deprivation.24

6. Bathani Tola

The barbaric massacre of 19 people took place in Bathani Tola hamlet of Badki Khadaon village, of the Sahar block of Bhojpur district. All the victims were gunned down by the well-armed marauders, nearly 150-200 in number, belonging to the Ranveer Sena. The Ranvir Sena’s killers converged on the village at about 1PM in broad day light, firing indiscriminately; the inhabitants of the village tried to resist with traditional weapons but had to retreat in face of a shower of bullets from every corner. They fled into open fields; their huts were set on fire. The marauders continued with this mayhem for nearly an hour. While a special police camp was only one km away form Bathani Tola and the

police arrived at the spot only by late evening. The victims belonged to Dalit, OBC and Muslim communities, and mostly poor and marginal peasants.\(^{25}\)

7. Haibaspur

On March 23, 1997, ten landless of Mushahar caste were killed in Haibaspur village in Patna district, apparently for aligning themselves with the CPI (M.L) Party Unity. Before leaving the village, the Ranvir Sena inscribed its organisation's name in blood on the rim of a dry well.\(^{26}\) It is alleged that alcohol and the rape of Dalit women by Bhumihars played a key role in the attack on the village. Although the police were informed immediately of the Haibaspur killings, they did not arrive on the scene until the following morning, after hearing that the Chief Minister was due to visit the site.\(^{27}\)

8. Ekwari

On the morning of April 10, 1997, members of the Ranvir Sena gunned down eight residents of Ekwari village in Bhojpur district in an operation that lasted two hours. Police officers stationed nearby forced open the villager's houses and then stood by and watched as the

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\(^{26}\) Outlook, New Delhi, April 9, 1997.

\(^{27}\) The Hindu, New Delhi, March 26, 1997
massacre took place. Seven of the eight killed belonged to the lower castes Lohars, Chamars, Dhobis and Kahars. The attackers raped a fifteen year old girl in presence of her father and a woman who was eight months pregnant was also raped. Both these were among the victims.28

9. Laxmanpur-Bathe

In the worst-ever carnage witnessed in the State, atleast 61 dalits were killed and four injured when hundreds of armed Ranvir Sena activists orchestrated an orgy of violence at Luxmanpur Bathe in the night of December 1, 1997. The deceased included 16 children 27 women and 18 mens. The age of the deceased persons varies from two years to 66 years.29

The village of Laxmanpur-Bathe has no electricity and is virtually inaccessible by road. In crossing the Sone River to reach the village, Sena members reportedly also killed five members of the Mallah (fisherman) community and murdered the three Mallah boatmen who had ferried them across the river on their way back.30 According to newspaper reports, the main reason for the attack was that the Bhumihars wanted to seize fifty acres of land that had been earmarked for distribution among the landless labourers of the village. A group of peasants,

28 The Times of India, New Delhi, April 13, 1997.
reportedly affiliated with Naxalite activity, was ready to take up arms against them. Authorities apparently knew of the tensions but had not cared to intervene in the land dispute and nip the trouble in the bud and instead allowed things to come to a head.

The massacre evoked widespread condemnation. The President, Mr. K.R. Narayanan, condemned the massacre in Jahanabad expressing anguish and disbelief on the incident where several poor and deprived families were killed. Extending his heartfelt condolences to the next of kin of those killed he said, "I share their agony and of all thinking, sensitive people. At the same time I would like to express my sense of revulsion at the unchecked growth of caste wars and economic war in parts of rural India especially against the poorer sections." He said it was a "national shame" that private armies should be employed by powerful interests to perpetrate such outrage. "Those found guilty of this carnage must be brought to account speedily and decisively", he said.

Following widespread publicity and condemnation about the massacre, Bihar Chief Minister Rabri Devi suspended the Jahanabad Superintendent of Police and also replaced several senior officers. The Chief Minister also announced about the cabinet's decision to constitute

31 Indian Express, New Delhi, December 3, 1997.
32 The Hindu, New Delhi, December 14, 1997.
Special Investigation Team (SIT) and a special court to try the marauders responsible for Laxmanpur Bathe killings.\textsuperscript{34}

Thus it can very well be said that positions of dominance and privilege in the rural hierarchy depends upon the control of land and other natural resources. The caste system supports and strengthen feudal authority in central Bihar, serving as the social and ideological basis for the denial of access to land and a life of dignity to the lower castes. It is also the basis for social enforcement of exploitation and oppression.

The fundamental contradiction between dominant castes, both traditional and post-land reform on the one land, and labouring castes on the other informs every aspect of social life and cannot be understood simply in caste terms in the narrow sense. The dominant castes are overwhelming in control of material, political and ideological power: they are both a dominant caste and dominant class. Therefore, status, honour or dignity are linked with politico-economic position. Caste power is also economic and political power.\textsuperscript{35}

\textsuperscript{34} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{35} Report, On Massacres in Jehanabad, p. 11, People's Union For Democratic Rights, New Delhi, August 1999.